

CAXTONIAN

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Collecting Whitman

R. Eden Martin

Editor's note: The following essay is an adaptation of a Caxton dinner lecture, given on March 19, 2003. A Caxtonian since 1977, Eden Martin is a partner in the law firm of Sidley Austin Brown & Wood.

I'd like to start by telling you about a conversation I had — several times — with one of my law firm partners, whom I had known since law school. Henry died a few years ago. He was a brilliant student and lawyer, and he had a fine library of scholarly books about law, history, literature, and languages — including literature in five or six languages, which he read fluently.

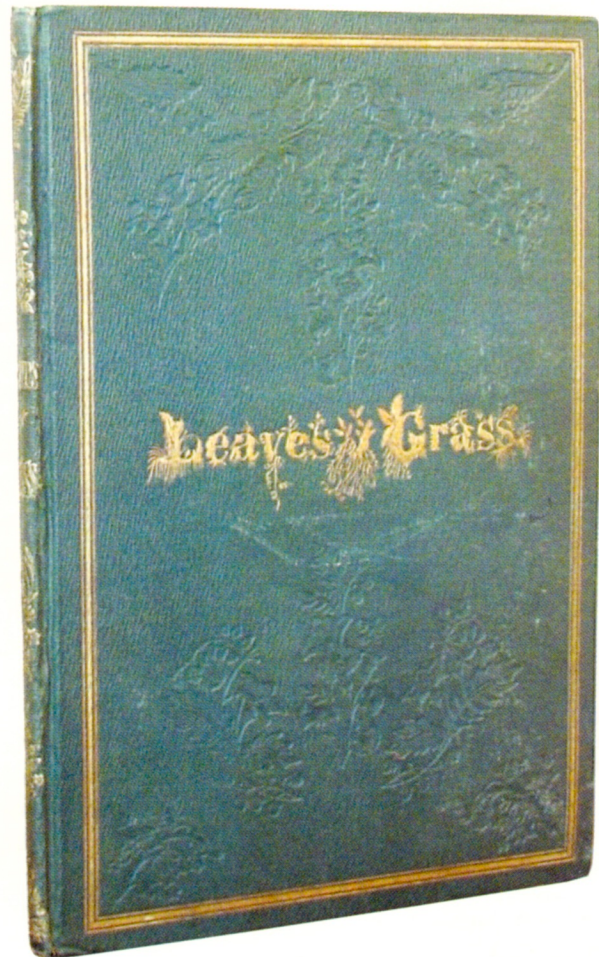
Henry enjoyed a good argument and used to kid me about why I collected first editions. I can understand collecting books, he would say — good editions, on good paper, well-edited, nicely bound. But why collect first editions? Why presentation copies? There is no particular usefulness in a first edition. Indeed, a well-edited modern paperback or cloth-bound volume is better than a first edition since you probably won't want to handle the first edition anyway, and you certainly won't want to make pencil marks in it.

Economically, it's wasteful to sink money into first editions. The investment doesn't produce goods or services, so it doesn't pay dividends. The market is highly imperfect. Dealers and auction houses charge far higher mark-ups and transaction fees than a stockbroker. Whether or not books appreciate depends on tastes, which change in ways that are unpredictable. Most collectors don't even argue that they do it for financial reasons — they just hope they won't lose too much. So — why collect first editions?

The lawyer in me compels me to try to clarify the question at the outset. Unlike the

word "is," the word "why" is ambiguous. When we use it, are we asking about causation? Or are we asking for a justification of what we do? Henry and I both understood that we were not talking about the psychological or sociological causes that move people to do things. We were talking about whether I could provide the kind of reasoned explanation that would justify — or perhaps even recommend — the peculiar habit of collecting first or early editions of great works of literature. We also weren't distinguishing — although one could — between the process of acquiring and the ownership itself. Book collecting involves both.

We had several versions of this conversation over the years. I want to suggest an answer to my friend's question — using Walt Whitman as Exhibit A. I feel obligated to tell you at the outset that I am not an expert on Whitman's poetry or his life, and although I have a few of his books, I have not in any sense focused on Whitman; and my collection of his works is quite modest compared to the great collections that were built — and in some cases sold — during the 100 years following his death.



Cover of first edition of 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*. All illustrations in this article are from the collection of Eden Martin.

I

The basic outline of Whitman's biography will be well known to this audience. He was born May 31, 1819, near Huntington, Long Island. His family moved to Brooklyn just before his fourth birthday, and his father worked as a carpenter. Walt spent six years in the public schools, and then went to work at the



Musings...

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Someone asked me recently what I did for a living. I said, "I edit a journal." "What journal?" he asked. "The Caxtonian," I replied. "Does it pay well?" he asked, somewhat nosily, I thought. "It doesn't pay anything," I answered. "I thought you said you did this for a living?" he said, becoming a bit surly. "For living, I edit the Caxtonian. For earning, I work elsewhere," I countered. "Oh," he said as he turned to leave, unimpressed.

So it is and so it has been for the past 10 years. Every month a major portion of my life revolves around the question, "What shall I feature in the Caxtonian next month?" And I'm happy to report, I've never come up short. For ten years, once a month, before the 10th of the month, almost always, Caxton Club members, subscribers, and friends have had a copy of the Caxtonian in the mail.

I usually work two or three issues ahead of deadline. Currently, for example, I just finished reading the fourth volume of Carl Sandburg's six-volume biography of Abraham Lincoln. I'll finish the remaining two volumes within a month and then read a more current biography of Lincoln and a new biography of Carl Sandburg. This fall, we will take the grandchildren to Lincoln's New Salem and Springfield for a weekend of Lincoln study. And in February 2004, I plan a Lincoln issue.

But the Caxtonian is not my publication; it's ours! And in almost every issue there are two, three, or four feature stories by Caxtonians and other book lovers. Working with the writers who so faithfully submit intelligent, diversely original stories is the finest of pleasures. Weaving the various unsolicited articles into some cohesive form, issue to issue, is the greatest challenge. Sometimes, it seems almost a mystery the ways things come together.

For example, take the August 2003 issue. Norma and I had sat with Sem Sutter at a Caxton dinner meeting four months ago, and I told him I had just finished reading Amos Elon's *The Pity of It All*. He said he was reading it as well, and that the University of Chicago, where he is a librarian, has a wonderful collection of printed items relating to Elon's study. "Why don't you give me a story with as many illustrations as you can provide, and I'll do something in 'Musings' on Elon's book. We agreed. Then a month ago, Pierre Ferrand, our resident European scholar, sent me the marvelous piece on Primo Levi, and thus, quite serendipitously, I had the lead story for Sem's and my plan, fulfilled in August.

It's very much like that in this living of mine: We have a coterie of friends who share from the lives of

their own minds, and they send their writing to me. And I meet people frequently, as NJC and I carry on this bookish life of ours, and I'll say to them, "Write an article on that for the Caxtonian!" And they often will.

To all those scores of people who have shared so generously their writings with The Caxton Club, I say "Thank you!" There would be no monthly publication without them. I must thank, as well, Mike Braver, who has formatted each issue for ten years; Charlie Shields, who was my first copy editor until his illness; Carolyn Quattrocchi and my son Jon in St. Paul, our current copy editors; and our printers, River Street Press, who printed the first two years free of charge and who take a special interest in providing high quality printing with each issue.

"What's the response of the club to the Caxtonian?" you ask. A conversation, reported by Fred Kittle, overhead during a recent social hour before a Caxton dinner meeting, may suggest an answer to the question: The first Caxtonian said, "Can you believe that Bob Cotner puts the Caxtonian together single-handedly every month!" The second replied, "Oh, yeah?" The first continued, "Yeah, and without any pay! Can you believe that!" The second countered, "Really? I gotta have a drink!"

There is some indication that the Caxtonian is appreciated by many, from generous comments and incoming letters. One member wrote recently, "I've kept every copy received over the past many years." And we have both individuals and a foundation, who are annual donors to the publication. To them we are grateful.

The Caxtonian has, I believe, added to the intellectual lives of many people and provides a continuing link between people who love books. Thanks to The Caxton Club for providing the opportunity to edit this publication these ten years. Thanks, as well, to the Editorial Board and our Contributing Editors, who have important roles in the publication. I must thank Paul Gehl and Bob Karrow of the Newberry staff for providing generously of their time and the library's rich resources to illustrate the Caxtonian.

Thanks to one and all!

Robert Cotner
Editor



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February 13, 2003

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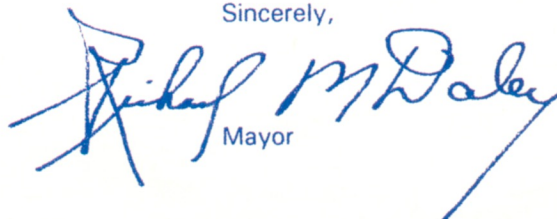
CONGRATULATIONS

As Mayor and on behalf of the City of Chicago, it is my pleasure to extend warmest congratulations to the Caxton Club on the occasion of the 10th Anniversary of the Club's magazine, "The Caxtonian."

Founded in 1895, the Caxton Club is an association of individuals who share a love of books. In 1993, the Caxton Club of Chicago began publishing "The Caxtonian," a journal of literature, the humanities and books, examining a wide range of issues of interest to those who love to read. I commend the Caxton Club for its promotion of reading and wish the Club and "The Caxtonian" much continued success.

Best wishes for an enjoyable and memorable anniversary.

Sincerely,


Mayor

Gauchos and cowboys — some literary traditions of the Americas

Pierre Ferrand

There is evidence that the Spanish Colonial authorities administering the areas of what are today the Republics of Argentina and Uruguay were deeply suspicious of the drifters they sometimes called “gauchos.” The original meaning and the etymology of the word are disputed. A plausible theory is that it is a Spanish word derived from the French “gauche,” meaning “uncouth,” and intended as a slur.

“Gauchos” were horsemen of the South American pampas. Often of mixed Indian and Spanish descent, they had the skills to survive by themselves on the endless plains of the area since they cared little for the amenities of civilization. Though usually preferring to shift for themselves, they were apt to work sporadically for the big cattle ranches, but were often too independent-minded to be reliable employees. Nomads with no fixed abode, they kept to themselves, disliked foreigners and were suspicious of outsiders. Though they had remarkable spurts of energy, they were considered lazy and addicted to drink, gambling, and brawls in the “pulperías,” (taverns) which they haunted. Their way of settling arguments was by knife fights rather than recourse to justice. Usually illiterate, primitive, and antagonistic to culture, they had little respect for constituted authority or even property rights. They were held to be a poverty-stricken rustic underclass, potentially dangerous, which could not be easily controlled. Some of them were no better than horse thieves or cattle rustlers, or bandits preying on travelers.

The suspicion of gauchos by the Spanish establishment in the New World proved justified since many of them rallied to the South American patriots, who fought for independence from Spain in 1810. During the civil wars that followed, they generally supported the so-called “federalists” who believed in far-going autonomy of the provinces and country estates rather than the “unitarios,” or unionists who advocated a more centralized government controlled by Buenos Aires of Rosas.

A staunch opponent of Rosas published a remarkable biography of Facundo in 1845, as a serial in a Chilean newspaper. He was Domingo

Sarmiento, (1811-1888), an educator and journalist, who lived many years in Chilean exile, traveled widely in Europe and in the U.S., and eventually became President of Argentina. Issued in book form as *Civilización y barbarie, o Vida de Juan Facundo Quiroga*, it is one of the classics of Latin-American literature and was a brilliant attack on the Rosas dictatorship and an analysis of its basis, inspired in part by the sociological method of Alexis de Tocqueville. His thesis was that Facundo and Rosas represented the gaucho spirit of illiteracy, violence, and lawlessness, and an assault against the values of Western civilization. While Sarmiento was objective enough to recognize the romantic charm of the nomadic gaucho culture, which he compared to that of primitive Arab or Tartar tribes, he felt emphatically that it was the wrong medicine for his country and that gauchos were dangerous. His book was translated into English by the wife of his close friend, the distinguished American educator Horace Mann (1796-1859); it also created a stir in France.

A number of non-gaucho poets used “gaucho” characters and an approximation of gaucho vocabulary and speech patterns as a way to reach a popular audience. There were, for instance, the patriotic verses of the Montevidean Bartolomé Hidalgo during the fight for independence, and the substantial texts by Hilario Ascasubi (1807-75), a political ally of Sarmiento, which fill nearly 1,000 pages of Horacio Jorge Becco’s *Antología de la poesía gauchesca* (Madrid, Aguilar, 1972). There is also a nearly 1300-verse poem by Ascasubi’s friend Estanislao del Campo, *Fausto*, published in 1866, which is a mild and rather elegant burlesque of a gaucho “country bumpkin” attending with limited understanding a performance of Gounod’s opera. However, the poem that really launched the abundant gaucho literature of South America was written by the journalist José Hernández (1834-1886), who had penned many scathing articles against President Sarmiento and joined in an armed rebellion against him.

It was *El Gaucho Martín Fierro*, first published in 1872, a poem of 2,325 octosyllabic verses, which became instantly popular. It was really a realistic saga in the form of a lament by the hero, who starts as a “good gaucho,” with wife and children, though exploited by a rancher. He is drafted into the army to fight Indians. (This was a timely touch. President Sarmiento had recently issued orders to enlist gauchos for that purpose, to Hernández’s disgust.) While a brave soldier, Martín is exploited by his commanders and cheated of his pay. He finally rebels and becomes a “gaucho malo,” or “bad gaucho,” kills a man in a knife battle, deserts, and is ruthlessly pursued. He discovers that during the years of his enforced absence, his family has been evicted, and his house destroyed. His wife, driven by poverty and despair, takes up with another man to survive. She has since died, and he cannot find his children. Cornered by those on his trail, he fights desperately, but manages to escape as one of his pursuers changes sides because he is impressed by his courage. Together, the two men join the Indians.

There is a sequel in a somewhat different mode, published in 1879, more than twice its length. In it, Martín describes life among the Indians, shown to be truly savage, and eventually returns to civilization, locates his children. In a grandfatherly way, he is full of wise saws and modern instances still popular in Argentina.

Martín Fierro, while uneducated and a drunkard, a brawler, and a murderer, claims that he is a victim of the powers that be who, like Jean Jacques Rousseau’s primitive man, was “born good.” As a native of the South American plains, he is deemed inherently superior to townsmen and the “gringos,” an epithet describing here the many immigrants from Europe, especially Italians, who were mean and corrupting influences in his view. (Sarmiento favored the cultural amenities of cities and mass immigration for he believed that “to govern was to people” the vast spaces of his country).

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Hernández, a cultured man, was undoubtedly moved by pity for an exploited underclass and his yearning for a pastoral utopia from which his hero was allegedly evicted. The appeal of his first poem involved, however, a significant dose of self-pity and nativistic xenophobia. While it is a genuine work of art, which memorably and tersely evokes the beauty of the pampas and graphically describes its inhabitants, its literary merit was exalted by influential South American intellectuals in the early 1900s as representing "the great Argentine epic." In my view, it is, rather, a brilliant novel in verse and, indeed, the first of the great gaucho novels. *Martin Fierro* inspired numerous other works (generally in prose), often written by distinguished writers of a conservative bent, nostalgic for the pastoral ideal and scorning modernity. Many of them opposed immigration from Europe and industrialization as destructive of native traditions, especially cattle raising.

Also, after the Spanish-American war, it became a fashion of its intellectuals to blame the U.S. and its alleged vulgarity and materialism for the area's lack of progress, and to write endless polemical treatises about Yankee exploitation and other sins. Much of this was inspired by José Enrique Rodó's urbane and very influential essay, *Ariel*, published in 1900, which specifically attacks immigration and urges that the South Americans should promote true culture rather than imitate their fanatically one-sided, materialistic and Caliban-like neighbor to the North. (Sarmiento, by contrast, who was Argentine Ambassador in Washington, 1865-1868, had praised the U.S. as a model).

Gaucho novels fit as part of this major intellectual trend. They have been an important literary genre for mainstream writers in Argentina and Uruguay. Respected authors dealing with the subject include Manuel Galvez, Enrique Larreta, Leopoldo Lugones, Benito Lynch and Carlos Reyes. Perhaps the greatest of 20th Century gaucho tales is *Don Segundo Sombra*, (1926) by the Argentine writer Ricardo Güiraldes (1886-1927), acknowledged as one of the masterpieces of Latin-American literature.

This beautifully written story tells of a delinquent boy who is taught to take responsibility for himself by a brave, independent, and just gaucho he admires. When he has become a genuine human being, fit to be a ranch owner, the gaucho, Don Segundo Sombra, his duty done, rides away into the pampas.

One of the curiosities of Latin American gaucho literature, many times re-edited, is *Los gauchos judíos* (1910) a series of well-written sketches by the Russian-born Alberto Gerchunoff, (1884-1950), who grew up in a Jewish agricultural colony of Argentina and described the life there in a spirit akin to primitive Zionism.

Though one may question the intellectual basis of the gaucho literature generally, a number of its works belong to the world's literature. In my opinion, they are greatly superior in quality to the innumerable tales about U.S. cowboys by the Ohio dentist, Zane Grey, the literary entrepreneurs Max Brand and Louis L'Amour, not to speak of the many other authors of an endless stream of pulp magazines and paperbacks. These products are usually formula stories without any depth, written strictly for entertainment.

They date back to the strong silent cowboy hero in the book by Owen Wister, *The Virginian: A Horseman of the Plains*, first published in 1902, which had some literary pretensions. While the ancestor of the classic Western, the book has been described as corny, flag-waving, and reactionary, containing wearisome lectures on Americanism, "which sound like a jingoist speech by Teddy Roosevelt, to whom the book is dedicated." (Herbert Mitgang, *The New York Times*, 12/2/1989). Wister (1860-1938), the son of a Philadelphia physician and a grandson of the famous actress Fanny Kemble, had gone to the West for his health, like his Harvard schoolmate TR, and fell in love with ranch life in Wyoming. He had written a few short western tales after an 1891 conversation with TR, a lifelong friend, in which the two men discussed the potential of their Western experiences for literature. Despite the success of *The Virginian*, he never authored another novel on the theme. Instead, he

published *Lady Baltimore*, (1906), which deals with the fastidious world of aristocratic Southerners. He edited or wrote a number of other books on a wide variety of subjects, including a rather bigoted anti-German pamphlet, *The Pentecost of Calamity*, (1915), which I read many years ago, and a memoir about TR, *Story of a Friendship, 1880-1919* (1930), which is of some historical importance. It is amusing to find that the modern Western had its origin in the illnesses of a couple of charter members of the Eastern Establishment.

TR wrote essays about ranch life, and, as well, *The Winning of the West* (1889-1895) as a popular history to make the country more conscious of the significance of the area's past. Wister's own preface to *The Virginian*, *A Horseman of the Plains*, describes it as a historical novel, an account of a vanished world. The famous 1893 essay by Frederick Jackson Turner had effectively recorded the passing of the frontier. The Great Plains were no longer the Cattle Kingdom, and Hamlin Garland had chronicled since the 1890s the grim and grimy realities of struggling Midwestern farms.

Even in its heyday, the glamor of the grimy, hardworking American cowboy was a myth. Unlike the gaucho myth of South America, it has not been embodied in any enduring literary classic. On the other hand, it has provided reading pleasure to many millions of people over the years, and will do so in the foreseeable future. Also, there have been several cowboy movie classics and a number of remarkable cowboy songs, many of them collected by the late Alan Lomax.

Author's note: Charles Darwin's comments on the gauchos, taken from *The Voyage of the Beagle*, first published 1839, may be of some interest: "At night we stopped at a pulperia, or drinking shop. During the evening a great number of Gauchos came in to drink spirits and smoke cigars: their appearance is very striking; they are generally tall and handsome, but with a proud and dissolute expression of countenance. They



Photo of Walt Whitman in 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*.

age of 11 — first, for lawyers running office errands, and then for a doctor. In 1831, when he was 12 years old, Walt started to work in a print shop, which did commercial printing and printed a weekly newspaper. It's likely that this was a fateful step in his life, because it set him on track to work as a newspaperman — to make a living as a writer.

Over the next dozen or so years, Walt worked in a series of print shops and newspapers — some in Brooklyn, some in New York City. He worked as a reporter, editor, and columnist. He wrote editorials, short stories, essays — and poems, which were conventional in style and subject.

Starting at the age of 17, Walt also taught in various country schools in Long Island — teaching during the school term, and working in print shops when school was not in session. When he wasn't working, Walt often took the ferry over to New York City, where he wandered around the city or went to musical shows and the theater. Other times, he visited his grandparents out on Long Island, getting to know working people and becoming familiar with the natural life of the fields and streams of the island, and with the sounds and rhythms of the sea.

In 1842, when Walt was 23 years old, he wrote and published an extended short story called *Franklin Evans*, a pro-temperance narrative about a young farmer's apprentice who succumbs to the temptations of the

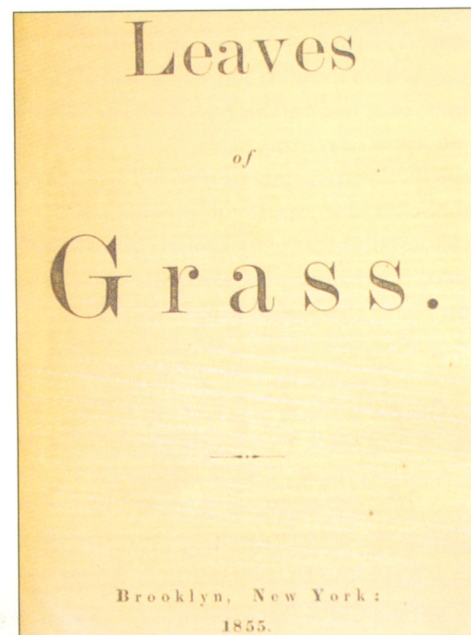
big city. This is sometimes referred to as his first "book" although it appeared in an "extra" issue of one of the newspapers he worked for. He later called it "damned rot — ... of the worst sort" and brushed it off as something he had written in three days under the influence of whiskey.

Walt continued throughout the 40s and early 50s to work as a newspaperman and printer, with a little carpentry work thrown in from time to time. His articles, stories, and poems continued to appear in the papers — but they did not prepare anyone for what happened in 1855, when Walt was 36 years old.

II

When Ralph Waldo Emerson read the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, he wondered about the background of the poet — and about what could have prepared him to produce these stunningly new poems. The story of why and how Walt's creative juices began to percolate, and how he devoted himself during late 1854 and early 1855 to creating a new kind of American verse, has been told elsewhere. Suffice it to say here that Walt apparently wrote or edited many of the 12 new poems, and also much of the text of his 10-page prose introduction, in the Brooklyn print shop, where he helped set the type for the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*.

I use the term "edition" to refer to pages printed from a single setting of type or plates. Within a single edition, there can, of course, be several different issues. In the case of the first edition of *Leaves*, there were six issues and several different variants of bindings. All in all, there were 795 copies, of which 337 were bound in June and July 1855 in a green cloth binding, with fancy, gold-stamped ornaments on the front and back covers and on the spine.



Title page of 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*.

Whitman's picture appeared opposite the title page, but his name did not appear below the picture or on the title page. The name "Walter Whitman" appeared in the copyright notice, and Walt referred to himself by name in the text of the first poem.

That first poem was by far the longest one in the book, and, like all of them, it then had no name. But you will remember it. It begins: "I celebrate myself, And what I assume you shall assume, For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you." A few pages into the poem, Walt refers to himself this way:

Walt Whitman, an American, one of the
roughs, a cosmos,
Disorderly fleshy and sensual... eating
drinking and breeding,
No sentimentalist ... no stander above men and
women or apart from them... no more modest
than immodest.

In July 1855, another 46 copies were bound in boards — but only one or two of these are known to survive. During December 1855 and January 1856, another couple of batches of 169 and 93 were printed and bound in a plain green cloth, with much less gilt decoration. And 150 were bound in yellowish green or pink paper wrappers; of these only two or three copies survive. By this time, Whitman had collected several reviews, and he had these printed and inserted in the front of the bound volumes.

Walt was his own publisher. He paid the printing costs, and he left copies for sale — price: \$2.00 — at various bookstores in Brooklyn and New York. He sent some to magazines and newspapers for reviews, and he sent other complimentary copies to prominent literary people, including Emerson. This turned out to be the smartest — or luckiest — thing he ever did.

Dr. Richard Maurice Bucke, later one of Walt's literary executors, reported that most of the 1855 books were "lost, abandoned, or destroyed," and he got this directly from Walt. Bucke — or Walt — added that most people considered the poems "meaningless, badly written, filthy, atheistical, and utterly reprehensible."

A few of the gift copies Whitman sent out were returned with insulting notes.

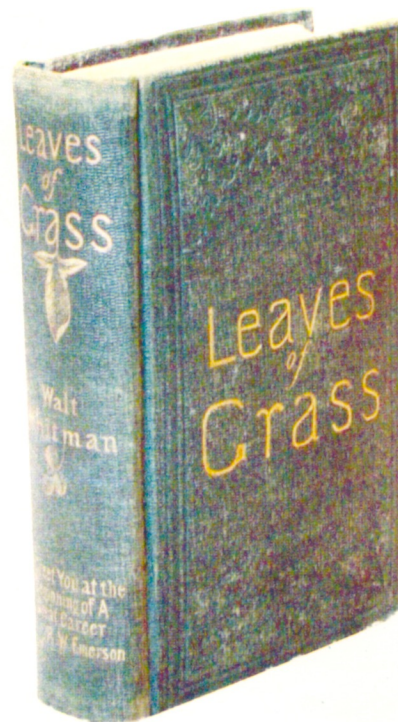
The great exception, of course, was Emerson, who promptly read his copy and dashed off a letter to Whitman, whom he had never met, saying, "I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere." He described the book as "the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed."

Walt carried Emerson's letter around with him for months. But the letter was too good to keep to himself. So, without asking or receiving Emerson's permission, he permitted it to be published in the *New York Tribune* on October 10, 1855. The letter was also inserted in copies of *Leaves*, which Walt sent to other literary people, like Longfellow and Whittier. Whittier looked through his copy of the book and then threw it into the fireplace. Naturally, Emerson found out about the unauthorized use of his letter as a promotional device. He told a friend that he had not intended that his letter be published, that he had given no permission, and that Whitman's conduct "was very wrong, very wrong indeed." But Emerson's irritation didn't prevent him from visiting Walt in Brooklyn later that year.

Walt may have heard rumblings about Emerson's irritation. Many years later, when his friend Bucke was preparing a book about him — with Walt's assistance and intense editorial scrutiny — he caused Bucke to say in his book that Walt had at first refused the request of Charles Dana, editor of the *Tribune*, to reprint the letter, "but on the second and pressing application, he consented."

III

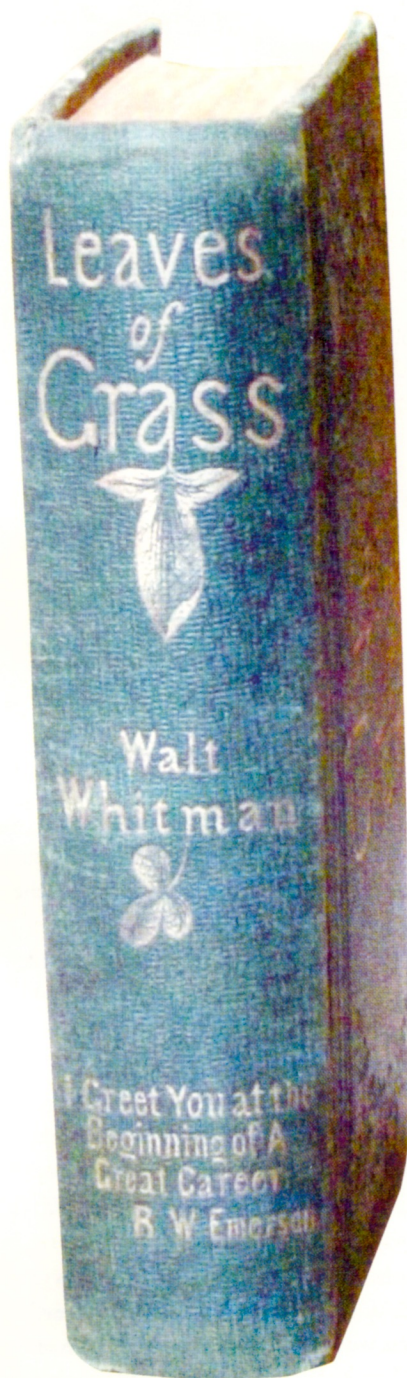
In the meantime, Walt was working on new poems and planning a second edition of the *Leaves*. Again, Walt was to be the publisher. He worked on the poems through the spring and summer of 1856, and the new book was announced in August. Instead of a tall, thin, elegant volume, the second edition turned out to be a less ornate, cheaper, shorter, and fatter volume than the first. He printed 1000 copies.



Cover of second edition (1856) of *Leaves of Grass*.

Sometimes, we tend to regard a second or subsequent "edition" as the later reproduction of an earlier work, which may be changed only slightly, if at all. No such notion would apply in this case. Over half the poems in the second edition of *Leaves of Grass* — 20 of the total of 32 — were new. Also, Walt made a few textual changes and lots of punctuation changes in the original 12 poems.

If only the 20 new poems had been included in a book with a new title, it would today be regarded as one of the great books of American poetry. On the title page of the second edition, as on the first, Walt's name did not appear. But opposite the title page, Walt's picture appears — the same one that was in the first edition. The long preface that had appeared in the first edition had been eliminated. The book commenced with the familiar, "I celebrate myself, and what I assume, you shall assume," — which was now given the name "Poem of Walt Whitman, an American." This poem was later titled "Song of Myself." One of the new



Spine of the 1856 edition.

poems was called "Sun-Down Poem," later renamed "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry." Many people regard this poem as the masterpiece of the first two editions and perhaps the finest he ever wrote. This is the way it started in 1856:

*Flood-tide of the river, flow on. I watch
you, face to face;
Clouds of the west! Sun half an hour high!
I see you also face to face.*

In a later edition, he changed the first line to:

Flood-tide below me! I see you face to face.

At the end of the second edition, Walt included several promotional items — the Emerson letter, Walt's reply to Emerson, and a number of the reviews of the first edition. Not content with publishing Emerson's letter at the back of the book, he also emblazoned on the spine, in gold letters, the following words: "I greet you at the beginning of a great career. R.W. Emerson." This time Emerson was furious, according to friends who were with him when he first saw the new, second edition. They reportedly said that before that day, they had never seen him "truly angry."

Another curiosity of this second edition is that of the nine reviews included at the end of the volume, Walt had written two himself — though, of course, without including his own name as the reviewer. His reviews were, needless to say, favorable.

But apart from his own reviews and a few other friendly critics, most of the reviews were just as negative as after the first edition. Bucke, who got his information from Walt, later wrote that the book was "savagely criticized," that some people in New York wanted Walt prosecuted for obscenity, but the prosecutors declined because they thought Walt was so popular, a jury wouldn't convict him.

Thoreau, however, liked the book — particularly the poem later renamed "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" — which he found "exhilarating, encouraging... very brave and American."

The book somehow managed to receive a broad geographic distribution. Out in Springfield, IL, a young lawyer named Herndon managed to get a copy. He put it on a table in his law office, where the poems were read and discussed by visitors. His law partner, himself a moody, introspective amateur poet, picked it up and read it for a half hour or so. Then he read portions aloud to the small audience in his

office. According to one who was there, the country lawyer "commended the new poet's verses, for their virility, freshness, unconventional sentiments and unique forms of expression, and claimed that Whitman gave promise of a new school of poetry." Later, the same amateur poet took the book home with him, and when he returned the next morning, he told Herndon that he had "barely saved it from being purified by fire by the women." I've wondered what ever happened to that copy — perhaps the most desirable copy in the world, next to Emerson's.

IV

In 1857, the year following the appearance of the second edition, Whitman began thinking about a new, expanded volume, which would speak to a larger audience — the nation at large — and express more fully his faith in democracy. By 1860 he was ready. This time he found a Boston publisher — or, more precisely, the Boston publisher, Thayer and Eldridge, found him. There were now 122 new poems to add to the 32, which had appeared in the second edition.

Emerson's irritation had apparently worn off because he continued to recommend *Leaves* to his friends; and shortly before the third edition was published, he took a long walk with Whitman around Boston Common in order to try to persuade him to omit three of the new "Children of Adam" sequence. The "Children of Adam" poems celebrated the love of men for women. Whitman must have supplied him with a set of the galley or page proofs. Emerson's arguments were not prudish — but strictly prudential. He thought inclusion of the poems in question would shock too many readers and hurt the reception of the book. Here are a few lines from one, which starts:

*From that of myself, without which I
want nothing,
From my own voice resonant — singing
the phallus,
Singing the song of procreation, ...
Singing the muscular urge and the
blending,
Singing the bedfellow's song, (O restless
yearning!)
From the pent up rivers of myself, ...
Singing the song of prostitutes; ...*

Remember, this is Boston, in 1860.

Emerson apparently wasn't bothered by the so-called "Calamus" poems — which celebrated

what Whitman called the “adhesive” love of male comrades for each other. He evidently did not read these poems with the same sensitivity with which they are usually read today.

In any event, Whitman did not agree with Emerson’s suggestion to omit the three poems. So they went off and had a nice dinner. Whitman told his friend Bucke years later that the “chief thing” in his mind was that “not one word” which had given “such terrible offense” in the earlier two editions was omitted.

The first 1000 copies of the third edition were printed and bound in mid-May, 1860, and were nearly gone by mid-June, when an additional batch was bound up for distribution. The book had grown to 456 pages. There was a new open-collared, Byronesque picture of Whitman, but his name still wasn’t mentioned on the title page. There was no prose introduction, and the ads at the end of the second edition were now omitted, as was the spinal endorsement by Emerson.

In addition to the *Children of Adam* and *Calamus* sequences, the new volume contained another poem with a dangerous title — “To a Common Prostitute” — though the title was far more suggestive than the text. There were also the “Chants Democratic and Native American,” and the first book publication of a poem Walt called “A Word Out of the Sea” — later renamed “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking” — another of his masterpieces. It started:

*Out of the rocked cradle,
Out of the mocking-bird’s throat, the
musical shuttle,...*

He later changed the first line to:

Out of the cradle endlessly rocking...

Again, if only the 122 new poems had been printed, and if the book had been given a new title, it would — like the earlier two books — be regarded as one of the greatest books of American poetry.

Not only were there many fine new poems, but the organization and flow of the material were improved. As one of Whitman’s modern critics, Roy Harvey Pearce, wrote: “The 1855 and 1856 *Leaves of Grass* volumes are but collections of poems — their organization ... rushed and chaotic... [The third 1860 edition]...is an articulated whole, with an argument. The argument is that of the poet’s life as it furnishes a beginning, middle, and end to an

account of his vocation. The 1860 volume is, for all its imperfections, one of the great works in that romantic mode, the autobiography.” (Pearce, Roy Harvey, in Bloom (ed.), *Modern Critical Views - Walt Whitman*, 1985, 73.) For these reasons, Pearce believed that this third edition was the greatest, or most important, of all the editions of *Leaves of Grass*.

But greatness doesn’t necessarily correlate to commercial success. By the end of the year, 1860, the Boston publishers — Thayer & Eldridge — were out of business. The plates used to print the third edition were sold and ultimately passed to one Richard Worthington, who two decades later engaged in several unauthorized printings in New York — despite the fact that he had no copyright. In the meantime, there had been several intervening new editions, with added material.

I noted earlier that when Whitman published the second edition, he included the journalist plugs at the end of the volume. This time the publishers of the third edition printed up a separate promotional booklet — in June 1860, about the same time as the second printing. They described it as “a circular to all persons disposed to commence the study of the Poems.” The booklet was flimsy and had paper wrappers. It was given away to reviewers and others. Apparently, not many copies survive. Included in the booklet were (of course) the Emerson letter from 1855 and also a couple of dozen book reviews and literary criticisms written by American and European critics.

Some of these reviews were quite complimentary — including the three anonymous ones Whitman wrote himself. Several were highly critical. For example, the *Cincinnati Daily Commercial* had criticized the poem, which became “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking,” as “unmixed and hopeless drivel.” The Boston publishers evidently believed that publishing such attacks along with the rave reviews would create interest and promote sales.

V

By the spring of 1861, Abraham Lincoln was President, and the country was torn by Civil War. Walt — too old for military service — remained in Brooklyn and started to write poems about the war that would later be included in a volume called *Drum-Taps*.

In early 1863, Walt moved to Washington in order to get away from what he called the “stagnation” of New York. He carried with him a letter from Emerson recommending him for a Federal government job. It took two years, but he finally obtained a clerkship in the Depart-

ment of the Interior. In the meantime, he did odd jobs and visited wounded soldiers in military hospitals, distributing candy, clothing, writing materials — and encouragement. He also worked on his poems about the war.

But as time passed, and the realities of war were brought home by his hospital visits, the mood of his poetry changed from upbeat — with drums summoning eager young soldiers off to battle — to funereal. In March 1865, Whitman was successful in getting a job with the Department of the Interior, headed by Secretary James Harlan. But his new duties didn’t prevent him from working on his new book of poems — *Drum-Taps*.

On April 1, 1865, Walt ordered 500 copies of the pages for this new book from his New York printer. On April 14, President Lincoln was shot. He died early on the morning of the 15th. On the 17th, Walt inserted a new poem about Lincoln in the new volume — “Hush’d Be the Camps Tonight.” But he soon realized that he couldn’t publish his new book without more on Lincoln. So he had a few of the 500 copies bound and given to friends — including one to Secretary Harlan, his boss. He put the rest of the pages in storage and started to write new poetry.

About a month later, Harlan fired him from the Interior Department. One story is that Harlan personally found Walt’s own copy of *Leaves of Grass*, with notes he had been making for a fourth edition. He then realized who Whitman was and discharged him. Walt later wrote that Harlan “turned me out for having written *Leaves of Grass*.” (Whitman, “An Indian Bureau Reminiscence.”) Many years later, someone asked Harlan why he had fired the poet. Harlan ducked — he said he couldn’t recall in detail; it wouldn’t be proper to answer because by that time Whitman was dead; but that in any event, he remembered that Whitman’s immediate superior had recommended his discharge on the ground “that his services were not needed.”

Walt wasn’t much hurt by his dismissal, because with the help of friends he soon obtained a position working for the Attorney General, who was either less fastidious or less knowledgeable. By the end of the summer of 1865, Walt had produced a new group of poems, which included: “When Lilacs Last in the Door Yard Bloomed,” “O Captain, My Captain,” “Dirge For Two Veterans,” and one of my favorites, “Reconciliation.”

With these additions, *Drum-Taps* was finally published in October. It consisted of the original sheets (72 pages) bound together with the new 24-page sequel, entitled "When Lilacs Last in the Door Yard Bloomed, and Other Pieces." The earlier version, without the sequel, is much scarcer; but the latter version, with the sequel, is the one that contains the first appearance of several of Whitman's greatest poems.

At the time, "O Captain, My Captain," was deemed the most successful — perhaps because it was more conventional in subject and was written using regular rhyme and rhythm. This is the one poem that was most included in anthologies during Whitman's lifetime, although he did not regard it as one of his better poems.

The little book was no better reviewed than the earlier editions of *Leaves of Grass*. William D. Howells gave it a bad review. A young Henry James, writing anonymously, dismissed it as the "effort of an essentially prosaic mind to lift itself, by a prolonged muscular effort, into poetry." James later came to regard Whitman as America's greatest poet.

VI

At the end of 1865, two months after *Drum-Taps* appeared, Whitman met Peter Doyle, an 18-year-old Irish Catholic, paroled from the Confederate army, who was then working in Washington as a horse-car conductor. Doyle later described their meeting this way: "...Walt had his blanket — it was thrown round his shoulder — he seemed like an old sea-captain. He was the only passenger, it was a lonely night, so I thought I would go in and talk with him. Something in me made me do it and something in him drew me that way. He used to say there was something in me that had the same effect on him. Anyway, I went into the car. We were familiar at once — I put my hand on his knee — we understood. He did not get out at the end of the trip — in fact went all the way back with me.... From that time on, we were the biggest sort of friends."

Doyle apparently had little education and knew nothing about poetry. Nevertheless, he and Walt took rides together, went on long walks, and Walt read him poetry. For five years or so, Whitman devoted himself to Peter Doyle as a friend, cajoled him as an older brother, worried about his health, and tormented himself about his affections for the young man —

scribbling coded notes in his notebooks about his compulsive and "humiliating" pursuit — and about his resolution to stop it. He sent Peter bouquets of flowers and tender notes. He also gave Peter the precious manuscript of *Drum-Taps*, which Doyle later lost.

The friendship lasted for many years. When Whitman suffered a severe stroke in 1873, Peter was one of his friends who took turns serving as his nurse. And when Whitman revised his will that same year, he left his silver watch to Peter — "with my love." Whitman's letters to Doyle from 1868 to 1880 — addressed to "Dear Boy," "Dear Son," and "Dearest Pete" — are collected in a separate volume entitled "Calamus," published in 1897 after Whitman died. Justin Kaplan, one of Whitman's biographers, wrote that "Whitman extended himself with Peter Doyle further than he had with any other man, and at greater risk to his psychic safety."

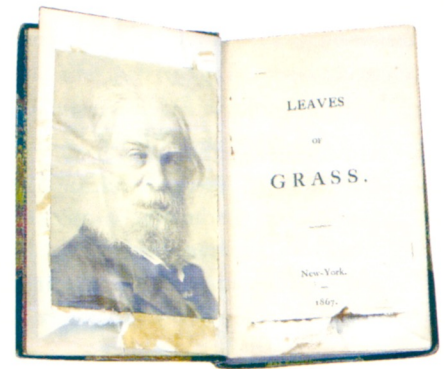
During the first two years of Walt's friendship with "Dearest Pete," he continued to work on a fourth edition of *Leaves of Grass* — one which would include 80 new poems; the *Drum-Taps* poems and other new material, including "Songs Before Parting." By the fall of 1866, Walt was working on draft page proofs. The book was to be printed by a New York printer. Walt himself was again the publisher, this time selling the book largely by mail. Early copies were available in October 1866, though the title page says 1867.

This is the copy of the fourth edition, which Whitman presented to his young friend, Peter Doyle, on April 29, 1868. Also in the book, pasted in opposite the title page, is a picture of Whitman, which he probably gave to Doyle at roughly the same time.

VII

After this fourth edition, there were four subsequent editions and many reprintings of *Leaves of Grass* during Whitman's life. He died in 1892. Space does not permit discussion of these at length here. But it is worth noting that several of these editions continued to include new or edited material — which makes them something more than simply a newly-printed edition of the original work. Also, these editions have fascinating histories. For example, the next edition, the fifth, published in Washington in 1871, added 28 new poems, including "Passage to India." The book had now grown to 263 poems.

The sixth edition appears also to have been published in Washington in the next year, 1872. Actually, it was a "piracy," entirely reset and reprinted in England during 1873 by a man named John Camden Hotten, who was seeking



Tipped in photo of Whitman and title page of presentation copy to Peter Doyle of 1867 edition.

Peter G. Doyle,
from
Walt Whitman,
Washington,
April 29, 1868.

Inscription in presentation copy of 1867 *Leaves of Grass*.

to make money from Whitman's work and to avoid the British censorship laws, or at least to avoid liability as publisher under those laws. Buxton Foreman later referred to this piracy as "one of the many meaningless swindles of the late John Hotten."

The seventh edition was published by James R. Osgood in Boston in 1881. The book now had 293 poems — 30 more than the fifth. Remember, the first edition had only 12. The first printing of this seventh edition was 1000 copies, with another 1000 printed and bound at the end of the year. Early the next year, 1882, under orders from the Massachusetts' Attorney General, the Boston District Attorney declared the book obscene, sent a list of lines to be stricken, and threatened the publisher, James Osgood, with prosecution if the changes were not made. Osgood tried to persuade Whitman to make the proposed changes, but he, of course, refused. The Boston District Attorney then offered a compromise, indicating that if Osgood eliminated just two poems — "To A Common Prostitute" and "A Woman Waits For Me" — the publication could continue. Osgood tried to get Whitman to agree, but he again refused. Osgood then called off the deal, giving the unbound sheets, the plates and \$100 to

Whitman

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Whitman. Walt later used these seventh edition plates to print the pages used in the "Complete Poems & Prose" and the so-called "Deathbed Edition."

Midway between these sixth and seventh editions of *Leaves*, Emerson, in 1874, published *Parnassus*, a poetry anthology consisting of 500 pages of the representative works of leading English and American poets. It included examples from such eminent American poets as E.C. Stedman and Forseythe Willson — but not a single line from *Leaves of Grass* — the earliest version of which Emerson had once called "the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom America has yet contributed."

Whitman also published several books under different titles. Some of these were books of poetry with titles other than "Leaves of Grass," but which eventually were folded into a later edition of *Leaves*. Some were collections of literary essays and reminiscences.

Perhaps sensing his approaching death, Whitman sought to leave in a single publication all of his poems and prose, in what he believed would be their final form. In 1888, he published this one-volume *Complete Poems and Prose* — a bulky volume, reprinting pages from previous collections of his works, but with revisions and corrections. There were 600 copies, each of which he inscribed. Mine is number 158.

In fact, this turned out not to be the last version. There were more reprints of *Leaves*, including the so-called "Deathbed Edition" — which was actually a reprinting, not a separate edition — and which appeared a few months before Whitman died, on March 24, 1892.

VIII

To celebrate his 70th birthday, Whitman's friends in Camden, NJ, where he lived, decided to hold a huge birthday party for him. There were speeches, eulogistic letters, and telegrams — all collected in a commemorative volume by Whitman's longtime friend, Horace Traubel, entitled *Camden's Compliment to Walt Whitman*, Philadelphia, 1889. This little volume contained a short "Autobiographic Note" which Whitman contributed for the occasion.

Whitman saw the note through the press himself and corrected the text by hand before it was finalized. This is the printer's proof of the note, with Whitman's hand-written corrections.

IX

So — why collect first editions, or important later editions, or presentation copies — or, for that matter, original manuscript material? When most people ask the question, I think they are asking not so much what causes you to engage in such seemingly ridiculous behavior. They want a reasoned explanation of why you find such collecting satisfying or enjoyable — or perhaps an argument for why your spouse should not start commitment proceedings.

The problem, it seems to me, is that all such tastes and interests exist beyond the proper sphere of argument or analysis. You have heard the old Latin maxim: "De gustibus non est disputandum." Certain kinds of things are simply beyond argument. Why do you like a particular fine wine? Or the music of Mozart? Or a painting by Picasso? Why does one of my partners enjoy collecting old sports cars, which he rarely has time to drive — while many others love everything connected with golf?

A first edition of any book by a great writer is an artifact of literary history. If you enjoy the novels and poems that we now regard as great, if you read them as a child or as a student in school, or if you read them for pleasure, or satisfaction, or inspiration as an adult, if they have entered into your vocabulary and your consciousness, how could you not be interested in the people who wrote them? And how could you not be interested in the way the books looked and felt when they were first given away by their creators, or read by the first generation of their readers? And if these things interest you, how could you not be even more interested in those copies themselves?

Why collect Whitman in particular? If you grew up with him, were struck by his uniqueness and his thoughtfulness, his in-your-face immediacy, his intimacy and his evasiveness, his big-hearted Americanism, his lack of gentility or respect for old rules, if you see his influence on other writers you value, like Hart Crane or Wallace Stevens, then how can you not want a copy of his books as they were first read, reviewed, or even tossed in the fire? So much the better if you can have the very copy he gave to a writer he admired, or to a cherished friend.

So, why collect first editions? To use an expression more often used in a different context, for those who are fascinated by artifacts of literary history, no argument is necessary. For those who are not, no argument is possible. ❖

Author's note: In addition to Whitman's own works, I have consulted the following secondary sources.

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Gauchos

Continued from page 5

frequently wear their moustaches, and long black hair curling down their backs. With their bright-colored garments, great spurs clanking about their heels, and knives stuck as daggers (and often so used) at their waists, they look a very different race of men from what might be expected from their name of Gauchos, or simple countrymen. Their politeness is excessive; they never drink their spirits without expecting you to taste it; but whilst making their exceedingly graceful bow, they seem quite as ready, if occasion offered, to cut your throat."

Bibliographical Comments: About gaucho poetry, I have used the text in Becco's "Antologia" referred to above. The prestigious Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges co-edited a similar collection of *Poesia Gauchesca* (1955) in two volumes, with useful comments, and has written several essays on the subject of Martin Fierro. There are several English translations of Hernández's poems. ❖

'Count of Darkness' — A great writer's least-read work

Dan Crawford

He was in a slump. People weren't buying, critics weren't applauding, publishers had become a good deal less pleasant. The phrase "has-been" was whispered. His private life, if not a perfect shambles, was tending that way.

What he needed, more than anything, was work. He was a writer: writing gave his life form and meaning. Something to write, something to rekindle old fires: he needed that. After all, he could still write — when he felt like it.

What could make him feel like it? His good old stuff was just that: old stuff. The world had moved on; other writers had moved with it. Something different was called for; he worked through dreary days and long nights trying to think of what that might be, even writing a jaunty article about projects he had started and abandoned.

At last, he decided that if what he was writing was old hat, an older hat would do the trick. Historical fiction could be as popular as *Captain Blood*, as literary as *Kristin Lavransdatter*. He'd been to college; he could do research. Somewhere in old books he would find new avenues for what he did best. Once he picked out the right era, he would find ideas which would revive his interest in writing, and thus in life.

So it was that F. Scott Fitzgerald, smarting from the lack of approval for *Tender Is the Night*, set to work on "The Count of Darkness," stories of a young hero in 9th Century France. In the lives and loves of people 1,000 years before his own time, Fitzgerald would find the answer to his problem.

And here one would like to write "he lived happily ever after." If there is a happy ending to this phase of Fitzgerald's career, however, it is that he set aside *Phillippe, Count of Darkness* for other projects, which formed a more fitting finish to his career. He did enjoy the research; perhaps it helped hold back his personal darkness for a while. But the verdict of critics then and now is that "The Count of Darkness" represents one of the biggest wastes of time on the part of any major American writer in history.

The epic is quickly summarized. A 9th Century French nobleman was killed during a raid on his home by the Moors. His family — a wife and small son — fell into the hands of the Muslim foe, but they were well treated in captivity, the widow eventually making a new life for herself. Her son, Phillippe, dreamt of one day inheriting his father's grand manor and beautiful estate. Eventually, the young man sets off for his homeland, seeking his fortune in the best tradition of folk tales.

He finds his father's manor to be a pile of rubble, and the lands around it desolate. France has been laid waste in the declining days of Charlemagne's dynasty. If Phillippe wishes to be a Count, he will have to fight for every inch of territory, enlisting the peasantry, exploiting suspicion and superstition, and becoming a bigger bully than any of his rivals.

Fitzgerald's plan was to write eight short stories about Phillippe's world, which would give him the material to merge into a continuous narrative, to be published as a novel. His enthusiasm flared; he wrote his legendary editor, Maxwell Perkins, that three novels might be necessary to cover the story. No, he wrote later, it would take nine books to follow Phillippe from young manhood to old age in the stronger France of the new Capetian monarchs.

What he wound up with was four sketchy short stories, which the magazine *Redbook* published — no one has ever thought of a nice way to say this — as an act of charity toward an author in decline. "In the Darkest Hour" appeared in October, 1934, "Count of Darkness" in June, 1935, "Kingdom in the Dark" in August, 1935, and "Gods of Darkness" only after Fitzgerald's death, in the November 1941, *Redbook*. Depression set in; Fitzgerald's stories came slowly, disappointing *Redbook's* editor, who had already pointed out that when his readers saw Fitzgerald's name on the cover, they didn't expect a gritty 9th Century war story. The gaps between stories worked against any chance of the series becoming popular with readers. The stories have not become any easier to reach now; only one of the stories has ever been reprinted. *Redbook* is not a magazine widely stocked in

research libraries, so the stories are hard to find and, when found, hard to read.

The "Count of Darkness" tales are really no worse than the vast run of historical tales cranked out to satisfy the market for magazine fiction in this period; they just aren't any better, either. Fitzgerald's research was spotty, and he tried to make the stories more accessible by mingling his medievalism with 1930s-underworld slang, probably picked up from gangster movies. Since part of the appeal of historical fiction was that it represented an escape from an America in the grips of the Depression; this was a strange decision even if the result had been skillfully handled. (Janet Lewis, in her summary of the series, points out the unintended hilarity of showing a woman thinking of her Viking captor as a "sugar-daddy.")

In choosing a romantic era to write about, Fitzgerald then chose not to write romantic stories about it. His swashes are not well buckled; instead his stories reflect both his own personal depression and the Great Depression with it. The adventures end grimly for all involved. People now read "The Count of Darkness" for two primary reasons: the spectacle of Fitzgerald in decline, and the character of Phillippe. For his hero, Fitzgerald wanted a character he'd never done much with: a self-confident, daring man of action. His Phillippe was to be rash, courageous, a man willing to make a fool of himself and then go on as long as the goal was in sight. So, naturally, he chose as his model Ernest Hemingway.

Even this didn't quite come out as planned. Hemingway and Fitzgerald weren't seeing much of each other at this point; Fitzgerald had to rely on his memories of a young Hemingway, in the good old days. (Hemingway was much on his mind; not only was Hemingway's writing career moving up as Fitzgerald's was declining, but a rumor had reached Fitzgerald that Hemingway's next novel was to be set during the Crusades, stealing his thunder in the historical genre as well.) The Phillippe who comes out in the stories is gloomy, grim, brooding — Conan the Barbarian without the exuberance — brave enough, brainy enough, but never sympathetic,

or, ultimately, very interesting. Critics have called Phillippe not so much a picture of Hemingway as a cardboard cut-out of a hero from a Hemingway short story.

Would it have come out all right in the end? The stories are inconsistent and packed with detail that was probably meant to work in the novel; they are as much an unappealing hodge-podge as Phillippe's emblem, a half-lion, half-pig creature designed by his witch friend Griselda. But maybe they're best considered as raw material, lumps of clay displayed to the public before the artist had had time to do more than outline the planned sculpture. If he'd found the heart to go on with the work, maybe Fitzgerald would have been able to see which experiments worked and which didn't.

The considered opinion of critics is that this is wishful thinking. The best that could have happened is that Fitzgerald would have found in *The Count of Darkness* an obsession, taking him away from *The Last Tycoon* and his later work. Continuing to try, continuing to fail, in this attempt to force his talent into a new and uncongenial direction, he would have fallen victim in the end to despair, and found the darkness that so afflicted him and his *Count* becoming complete. ♦

Gift books and accessory items Available from the Caxton Club

The following inventory of archive holdings available for sale from The Caxton Club is printed for members' review and consideration. Many issues of the *Caxtonians* are available, as well. Interested persons should contact Dan Crawford at the Caxton office.

- 207, Vertulon Rich, *Western Life in The Stirrups*, 1965.
- 68, H. Pecham, *Memoirs of The Life of John Adlum in The Revolutionary War*, 1968.
- 172, Rudy Ruggles Presents Arthur Swann, 1956.
- 170, Paul Angle, *On A Variety of Subjects*, 1974.
- 52, L. Towner, *A Summary View of The Rights of British America*, 1976.

Reciprocal walks with Robert Frost

Jack W.C. Hagstrom, M.D.

Editor's note: Dr. Hagstrom is Emeritus Professor of Pathology, Columbia University. He is the author of over 100 scientific articles, numerous papers on bibliographic subjects, and the co-author of descriptive bibliographies of the works of Thom Gunn (1979) and Dana Gioia (2003). He lives in Water Mill, NY.

While a student at Amherst College (1951-55), I had the great good fortune to meet two persons who would irrevocably change my life in different ways. This short essay is about the first, Robert Frost, and some walks we took together. For the record, the second person was the Rt. Hon. The Earl Amherst, M.C., born in 1896 and died in 1993; he was my closest friend, but that's another story.

One of the "selling points" of Amherst College in the 1950s was that Robert Frost spent several weeks at the college in the spring and autumn. (Frost had had a long association with Amherst off and on from 1916 until 1938, when his wife died, and he moved away.) He was recruited back to Amherst in 1948, as the Simpson Lecturer in English, with few responsibilities, by the then President of the college, Charles W. Cole.

At the beginning of my freshman year, in early October 1951, I saw posters on campus announcing Robert Frost's reading in Johnson Chapel on the evening of October 23. A couple of days before the reading, I had a telephone call from the president's secretary, Peggy Boyd, inviting me to a small reception at the

President's home after the reading. (I never would know what prompted that invitation, as I did not know the president in any personal way, nor had I ever met Robert Frost before.)

I readily accepted and attended the reception after the reading. There were a few faculty members and their wives, a couple of other students, President and Mrs. Cole, and Robert Frost. It was all very relaxed and as casual as one was in such circumstances in 1951. As the evening was drawing to a close, about 11 p.m., President Cole asked me if I would walk to the Lord Jeffery Inn (some two block away) with Mr. Frost. As we got near the Inn, he asked me if I was tired or would I like to walk some more. And walk we did! As I recall, we walked around Amherst until about 2 a.m.

As I was taking leave from him in the lobby of the inn, he asked me if I'd like to come by and see him in his room in the morning, at about 10:30 a.m. That was the beginning of a close avuncular friendship that would continue to grow and flourish until he died in 1963. When Frost was based in Amherst and had readings in other places in New England, I would often drive him, returning either to Amherst or to Cambridge. One time, on the way to Cambridge from Amherst, he asked me if I had ever seen Walden Pond. I hadn't, and so we made a detour and found the pond; we were disappointed to see it sadly neglected with lots of litter. On these drives, we covered many miles, and any subject was fair game for conversation.

After leaving Amherst, I was admitted to Cornell University Medical College, associated with the New York Hospital in New York City, on York Ave. at 69th St. When Robert (and he told me to call him "Robert" in 1953 because he "hated the inequality that 'Mister' inferred") was in New York, as he was frequently, he would always stay at the former Westbury Hotel on 69th St. and Madison Ave., five long blocks from my apartment. I would often go to the hotel and pick him up for a scheduled reading. Afterwards, it was a regular thing that he (and I) would be invited to the apartment of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Blumenthal (of Spiral Press fame) on W. 21st St., for a small reception.

When we arrived at Joe and Ann's apartment, Robert would first have an egg along in the

- 259, B. Young, ed., *RHM, A Man and His Letters*, 1984.
- 108, Frank Piehl, *The Caxton Club*, 1995.
- 170, *Diaries of John M. Wing*, 2002.
- 18, Men's necktie.
- 19, Scarf.
- 178, Lapel Pin or Tie tack.
- 53, Eric Gill, "An Alphabet Stone," 1963, (poster).

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Richard Christiansen remembers Chicago theater

Albert Williams

Editor's note: Albert Williams is a Staff Writer and Theater Critic for The Reader of Chicago. We welcome his contribution to this issue.

Richard Christiansen has been covering Chicago theater for 40 years. "Noted for his accuracy, fairness, and reportorial style" — to quote the *Cambridge Guide to American Theatre* — he was there when Hull House Theater under director Bob Siskinger introduced local audiences and artists to the work of Beckett, Albee, and Pinter; when Paul Sills' freewheeling Story Theater, Stuart Gordon's outrageously imaginative Organic Theater, the gender-bending Godzilla Rainbow Troupe, the rock-and-rolling Free Theater, and Kingston Mines' '50s spoof *Grease* made Lincoln Avenue the off-Broadway of Chicago; when David Mamet began penning his shocking, edgy dark comedies; and when a group of actors fresh out of college got together under the name Steppenwolf. From his start at the old *Chicago Daily News* to his long tenure at the *Chicago Tribune*, he chronicled the evolution of homegrown theater from its amateur beginnings to its present world-renowned status.

Christiansen retired from the *Tribune* in 2002, but he's still on the beat. The project now is *A Theater of Our Own: A History and a Memoir*, slated for publication by Northwestern University Press in October 2004. "It's not just about the years I've witnessed," Christiansen says. "I'm casting the net a little farther back in time — to 1837. That was the year Chicago was incorporated as a city — and the year the first legitimate theater was established here in the dining room of an abandoned inn, the Sauganash. Even I wasn't around then!"

Raised primarily in Oak Park, Christiansen majored in English at Carleton College, where he worked on the school paper and headed the student drama club. After graduating from Carleton in 1953, "I did postgraduate work at Harvard," he recalls. "But after a year I realized I didn't want to be an academic. I just did not have the scholarly bent to dig into *Beowulf*. I wanted to go to the movies and the theater."

Returning to Chicago, Christiansen traveled the traditional Chicago journalist's career path: "I did seven months at City News Bureau, where my companion was Mike Royko. In July of

1957, I was hired at the *Chicago Daily News* as a general assignment reporter and worked the midnight shift for three or four years. It was like working in an emergency room."

Christiansen eventually moved to Features, and when publisher Marshall Field decided to launch a weekend entertainment section, Christiansen was, in his own words, "gung-ho. Field was trying to make the paper into an upper-middle-brow publication with an emphasis on the arts. He brought in [editor] Herman Kogan with a special mission of creating some kind of arts-and-entertainment initiative."

In 1963 Kogan started "Panorama," the *News*' weekend cultural supplement, with Christiansen as reporter, reviewer, and eventually editor. After a brief detour in the mid-1970s as editor of *Chicagoan* magazine, Christiansen returned to the *News* as critic at large until the *News* folded in 1978. "I was all set to segue to [the Field-owned] *Sun-Times*," Christiansen says. Then the *Tribune* called. "The *Daily News* ceased publication March 4, 1978 — and I joined the *Tribune* on March 6."

From the start, Christiansen admired the youthful, grassroots theater that was beginning to spread as an alternative to the commercial mainstream. "I'd been going to theater downtown, and so much of it was crap. To go to these little community operations and see wonderful things in these small spaces was a revelation to me." Young enough to appreciate raw, cutting-edge work, he was also "establishment" enough to persuade mainstream audiences the work was worth supporting.

Productions that linger in his mind include Steppenwolf's *Balm in Gilead* in the old Hull House Theater space — "the best thing I've ever



Richard Christiansen

seen, bar none" — and Wisdom Bridge's *In the Belly of the Beast*, starring William Petersen (now of TV's *CSI*) in an agonizing portrayal of imprisoned murderer Jack Henry Abbott. Christiansen wrote of having to pull off the Outer Drive on his way home and wipe tears from his eyes. "It became known as 'the pull-over review,'" Christiansen says. Indeed, the term "pull-over review" came to signify any Christiansen rave.

Some critics would have tried to parlay such power into celebrity, setting themselves up as more important than the artists they cover. Christiansen's most important legacy is that he never did that; whether you agreed or disagreed with his opinions, you would never accuse him of self-aggrandizement. Chicago theater's world-class status is based in large part on its tolerance for risk and failure and its emphasis on cooperation over competition.

See CHRISTIANSEN, page 15

Christiansen's writings both reflected and shaped that aesthetic, encouraging readers to appreciate new work and the long-term growth of local theater.

His recent research has taken him to the Chicago Historical Society, the Newberry Library, and the Chicago Public Library's Harold Washington Center, where the special collections department maintains archives of numerous Chicago theaters — "not only programs and reviews but corporate papers, memos, even documents spelling out who cleaned the bathrooms when," he laughs. Another valuable resource was the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, which holds the archives of Maurice Browne. "He ran the Little Theatre in the Fine Arts Building around the World War I era. I had only a vague knowledge of the Little Theatre movement, or of the original Hull House Theater under Jane Addams. Now I'm finding that their stories are every bit as fascinating as Steppenwolf and the Organic."

Christiansen has also conducted "scores of personal interviews. I've been lucky to talk to people here whose memories go as far back as the 1930s — Studs Terkel, Danny Newman, Nate Davis." Of course, the inherent problem with memory is its fallibility. Christiansen has had to double-check his interviewees' facts. He's tried to be equally careful with published accounts: "You find all sorts of little errors — misspellings, wrong dates, confusion about what was on the bill at any given performance. My hope is that I don't add to the confusion."

Caxton Club members will get a preview of the book on Wednesday, September 17, when Christiansen addresses the group's first dinner program of the fall season. In his presentation — "Overtures: Bits and Pieces in Process From a History of Theater in Chicago" — he'll discuss his research and read excerpts from the manuscript. "This will be a good way for me to test the material," he says. "It'll be a pre-Broadway tryout." ❖



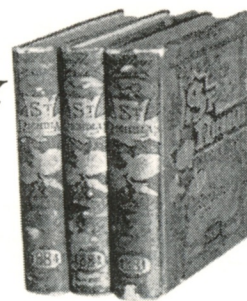
Robert Frost at Amherst College in 1953. From the collection of Jack Hagstrom.

kitchen with Ann Blumenthal, a kind of letdown time, and then join the gathered group of friends in the living room. The guests for these receptions at the Blumenthals were usually quite varied, with a scattering being predictable: e.g., Alfred Edwards, Robert's publisher, the Russell Potters, good friends of the Blumenthals, and many times Larry Thompson, Frost's "designated" biographer. It was a chance to meet some extraordinary people; some would become good friends. Incompletely I recall meeting Mark and Dorothy Van Doren, Oscar Williams, Clara Mayer, Marianne Moore, and often Elsie Sergeant.

At the end of the Blumenthal evenings, Robert and I would take a cab uptown to the Westbury Hotel, and Robert would say, "I think I'll walk you home." We would walk up and down 69th St. between just short of Madison Ave. and just short of 1st Ave. until well into the early morning hours, talking about anything and everything and everybody. It was usually Frost who would walk back to the Westbury alone.

They were wonderfully relaxed times. He was extraordinarily kind to me on many occasions when I needed an ear and some caring advice; he never left me wanting. These walks continued well into 1962. Robert died on January 27, 1963. ❖

Saints & Sinners Corner



We are saddened to learn of the death of Caxtonian Minor Myers, Jr. President of Illinois Wesleyan University, 60, of lung cancer. Mr. Myers was a devoted collector of "everything 18th Century," and he and his wife had an extensive antique furniture collection, as well as Mr. Myers' 18th Century book collection.

Nicholas Basbanes wrote of Mr. Myers in *Patience & Fortitude*: he "provides an interesting case study in how a collector's focus can represent a certain attitude, and how it can work in many exciting ways to preserve the creative wisdom of another time." In *Among the Gently Mad*, Basbanes quotes Mr. Myers, saying, "A shelf of books bespeaks the soul whose hands have put it there."

While not a frequent visitor to Caxton meetings, he was a close friend of many. We shall miss him as colleague and collector, and we extend to his family our deepest sympathy.

Word has been received of the death of James Lamar Weygand, Nappanee, IN. Mr. Weygand, a miniature bookman and friend of Caxtonians, was featured in an article by Caxtonian Suzanne Pruchnicki, in the July 2003 issue of the *Caxtonian*. We send our condolences to friends and family.

Caxtonian Peter Stanlis spoke on "Sensibility and the French Revolution" at a week-long conference in Paris, France, on the French Revolution. He was among other American, English, Dutch, and French scholars participating. Peter also lectured on "Philosophical Interpretation of Robert Frost's Poetry" in Mecosta, MI.

Caxtonian Kenneth Nebenzahl has completed the manuscript for a new book, *Spices, Silks & Souls – The European Mapping of Asia*. The book, scheduled for fall publication, continues Ken's important chronicling of cartography around the world. We look forward to seeing the latest edition to what has been a splendidly printed collection.

Bookmarks...

Luncheon Program

September, 2003

Steve Tomashefsky

"Parlement of Fowle[r]s"

At our first luncheon program of the new season, Caxtonian Tomashefsky will introduce us to his collection of dictionaries of English usage, some of which pre-date H. W. Fowler's 1926 classic, *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, but most of which update his work or take a different theoretical approach.

Fowler has nearly become a brand name, along with Webster, Bartlett, and Roget. The first Fowler edition has retained its authority, mainly because it is beautifully written and places emphasis on being helpful, as opposed to scolding the masses for their solecisms. It is also delightfully quirky and entertaining. It is the only book of its kind included in the famous "Printing and the Mind of Man" exhibition at the British Museum in 1963.

Fowler's success is interesting mainly because he was not an academic scholar, a well-known writer, or a sophisticated man of the world. He lived much of his life in relative seclusion on the Isle of Guernsey and, it appears, got much of his information from reading the *London Times* and listening to BBC. Much of his career was devoted to preparing abridgements of the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

Steve will illustrate interesting aspects of Fowler's book and the ways in which his two revisers, Ernest Gowers and Robert Burchfield, have changed it, and the ways in which his followers, including Bergen Evans, a late Caxtonian, have staked out their own territory. He will show samples from his collection,

including a few special editions and some efforts to adapt the work to American audiences.

There's always a good meal to be had, great fellowship, and interesting discussion. Come, welcome your friends back from summer, at the first Luncheon Program of 2003-2004.

Edward Quattrocchi & Leonard Freedman
Co-Chairs

October Luncheon and Dinner programs

At the luncheon meeting on October 10, 2003, Caxton interns, Jill Summers and Emily Reiser, will tell of their work in the book arts at Columbia College.

At the dinner meeting on October 15, 2003, Thomas Slaughter will lecture on the timely topic, "Exploring Lewis and Clark."

Dinner Program

September 17, 2003

Richard Christiansen

*"Overtures: Bits and Pieces in
Process from a History of Theater"*

The fall 2003 season of evening programs at The Caxton Club will begin on Wednesday, September 17, when Richard Christiansen will talk about his experiences researching the early history of the theater in Chicago.

Christiansen has been observing and reporting on Chicago's performing arts scene for more than 40 years: as a reporter, feature writer, editor, and critic-at-large for the *Chicago Daily News*; as editor of *Chicagoan Magazine* (1973-74); and at the *Chicago Tribune*, where he reviewed plays for 24 years.

He is now at work on a book, to be titled *A Theater of Our Own: A History and a Memoir*. It recounts the history of the theater in Chicago, starting from incorporation of the city in 1837 — coincidentally the same year of the first professional theatrical performance here — through today. His Caxton presentation will highlight the process of making the book. You will not want to miss meeting and hearing a person you have probably read often in your newspapers.

And, of course, the first gathering of book-lovers in the fall season is always a great delight. There will be, as well, a brief recognition and celebration of the 10th Anniversary of the *Caxtonian* at this dinner meeting. Join fellow Caxtonians and friends at this first meeting of the new year.

Robert McCamant
Vice President and
Program Chair

All luncheon and dinner meetings, unless otherwise noted, are held in the Mid-Day Club, 56th floor of BankOne, BankOne Plaza, Madison & Clark, Chicago. Luncheon and discussion, 12:30pm. Dinner meetings begin with spirits at 5pm, dinner at 6pm, lecture at 7:30pm. **Members planning to attend luncheons or dinners must make advance reservations by phoning the Caxton number, 312/255-3710.**

Luncheon for members and guests, \$25. Dinner, for members and guests, \$45.